

ONE IN CHRIST



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FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

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PRESENTATION ONE

Following Christ in the Vocation of Marriage

PRESENTATION GOALS

- ☞ To understand God's intention in establishing the marriage covenant between a man and a woman and that the human family is a reflection of God's rich, Trinitarian life.
- ☞ To explore the meaning of marital communion and relationship in relation to the Trinitarian communion of love.
- ☞ To give an overview of creation, the Fall and redemption and to show the effects of Original Sin in our lives, especially in marriage, and how God's grace is the remedy to a happy, healthy, holy, and lasting marriage.
- ☞ To explain that the vocation of marriage is directed toward a person's own salvation and that of others, primarily the spouse and children. Moreover, in marriage, couples are being called to seek the goodness, integrity, holiness, and salvation of their spouse. Couples will perfectly do this if they follow the example of Jesus Christ.
- ☞ To show that marriage is built upon mutual love and understanding, generosity, forgiveness, humility, reverential service, and, most importantly, self-sacrificial love that mirrors Christ's unconditional love for his Bride, the Church.

PASSAGES IN BOLD CORRESPOND TO
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION TITLED
"Following Christ in the Vocation of Marriage"

Our First Parents; “The First Wedding”

In the beginning God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”¹⁰

MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.’”¹¹

The “our” and “us” is the first reference to the Blessed Trinity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a perfect communion of love; a relationship of Persons. God, who needs nothing, desires to create us in order to give us a share in his divine life. Here on earth, we strive to know, love, and serve him so as to obtain eternal happiness with him in Heaven for all eternity.

Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the other hand, the question of the right relationship between the man and the woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found.

In other words, it cannot be separated from the ancient but ever new human question: Who am I? What is a human being? And this question, in turn, cannot be separated from the question about God: Does God exist? Who is God? What is his face truly like?

The Bible gives one consequential answer to these two queries: the human being is created in the image of God, and God himself is love. It is therefore the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God; man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.¹²

The day when you exchange your wedding vows, the Lord Jesus will transform and elevate something ordinary and natural (your human love) and make it extraordinary and divine. God will do this because you have responded wholeheartedly to his divine love and his call to love. Through your love for each other and God’s grace, you will make manifest to your family, friends, the Church, and society the truth about God, ourselves, and marriage, in that, when we love as God loves, we show forth more perfectly the image and likeness of God in which we are all created. We witness to the beauty of God’s unconditional love and the divine truth that God is love when we respond to his call to love. As a result, we are transformed into the likeness of his being.

A child was once asked, “Why do we go to Mass?” The child responded, “To give worship to God.” “And what happens to us when we do this?” asked the teacher. The child said that “it makes us more united to God and to one another; it gives us grace to love God and others more and more each day; and it enables us to live in communion with God, which is like living in a family here on earth.”

Essentially, what this child had articulated was the nature of the Blessed Trinity and how the family mirrors our relationship to God in three Persons. The communion of love, the relationship that exists within the Blessed Trinity, consists of the Father who begets the Son (from his very essence), and in the begetting falls “madly in love” with the Son (because he is the perfect image of the Father), and, from the ecstatic overflowing love that flows from each, manifests the love of the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. (The Lover, the Beloved, and the Love that proceeds from both).

God's revelation of himself is not only true and good, but also *beautiful*. The beauty of God's love is the mystery of reality; it is the true meaning of life, of existence, of being. Just as we are overwhelmed by a beautiful work of art, so God's love overwhelms us, transforms us, brings us to ourselves, and awakens us to respond to God with love.¹³

“Before the beautiful—no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only ‘finds’ the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.”¹⁴

Before creating man, the Creator withdraws as it were into himself, in order to seek the pattern and inspiration in the mystery of his Being, which is already here disclosed as the divine “We”. From this mystery the human being comes forth by an act of creation: “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen 1:27).¹⁵

It was from within this overflowing communion of love that each us received our existence; a love that could not contain itself; a love that freely gives and overflows to another or in marriage to beget another human being. At the moment of conception, God's image and likeness is made manifest in the human person and the very presence of the new child witnesses to the world that the imprint of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the source of all life and that divine and human love bring us into this world so as to share in the communion of love in Heaven with the Lover, Beloved, and Love.

Think about what a child experiences when he or she is born into this world, the moment when the father and mother gaze into the child's eyes. The child experiences for the first time what it means to belong to a communion of love, to be in relationship, to be a part of a family. It is from this experience that we all desire to become a part of the larger community of humanity and to seek beyond ourselves to the eternal communion of love for which we have all been created.

The birth of a child makes us realize that love grows through love and as our Holy Father said in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Love is ‘divine’ because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and worldly understandings of love and makes us one.”

God is rich in relationships, communication, and love for all people. The Blessed Trinity models to us what the dynamic Trinitarian life is all about—communication, relationship, and affection. The quality of our Christian life is based on imitation of the interior life of the Trinity. Why is it important to believe that God is One in Three Persons: a communion of love? If God is defined merely by function of what God does rather than what God is: a loving relationship of Persons, then our understanding of the family loses its meaning as a relationship of persons who exist to love and to be loved. The family, like the Blessed Trinity, is not merely defined by what it does, but rather by what it is: a relationship of persons called to communion with God and one another.

Another temptation is to embrace the modern idea of the human person strictly as an individual, in contrast to seeing our identity in terms of relationship. Cardinal Francis George commented that:

If we are individuals for who relationships are just added on, rather than persons who are born related, then we start with rights and not duties and obligations to others. Since rights have to be protected, we get into a legal framework that is almost adversarial. Society becomes brittle and violent. Natural community, such as marriage, is much weakened. People's mobility and pursuit of one's own dreams, even in conflict with others, have become something of a priority in our culture. This doesn't foster the kind of relationship that is necessary to live humanely... while

there is conflict to a certain level, the highest level is one of harmony and peace, mutual love and love of God.¹⁶

To be created in the image and likeness of God means, therefore, that human beings reflect not the life of a solitary deity, but the communal life of the Trinity. Human beings were created not to live solitary lives, but to live in communion with God and with one another, a communion that is both life-giving and loving.¹⁷

Have we not all, perhaps, felt most alone when we embrace the world's ideology of individualism and fail to foster our relationship? In our relationships with our fiancé, family members, friends, and co-workers, are we not most alone when, in our selfishness, we seek to divide rather than unite? Manipulate and dominate rather than surrender to charity, generosity, and kindness? Control rather than embrace humility?

When we choose to fashion God in our own image and likeness do we not distance ourselves from others, especially our spouse, and compete with others so as to assert our self-will, our own desires, ambitions, appetites, over and against our spouse or neighbor's?

Today human beings not only create their own gods they seem to claim themselves as gods and want to transform the world, excluding, putting aside or simply rejecting the Creator of the universe. Man no longer wants to be the image of God but the image of himself; he declares himself autonomous and free. Obviously, that reveals *an inauthentic relationship with God*, the consequence of a false image that has been constructed of him, like the prodigal son in the Gospel parable who thought that *he could find himself by distancing himself from the house of his father*.¹⁸

Thomas Merton once said, "People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centered on themselves, can only conceive one way of becoming real: cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast and distinction between themselves and other men. They do not know that reality is to be sought not in division but in unity; for we are members one of another."¹⁹

By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, which is perfectly manifested at the Baptism of Jesus, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange. The Trinitarian God, who is utterly transcendent yet radically immanent, reveals to us that just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do nothing apart from each other, we are called to interact with others as though we are interacting with God himself and participating in the divine exchange of love.

What is so unique about this communion of love that we share in, in relation to marriage, is that it does not remain turned in on itself, but it gives generously, infinitely without boundaries or limits. Discouraging words and actions that tear at the very heart of this communion and unity are not only debilitating to the spiritual life and to marriage but in the end leave us alone and isolated from God and others.

This is a time of preparation for Heaven. By seeing and loving in others what Christ sees and loves in us we not only imitate the dynamic Trinitarian life—communication, relationship and affection, but we communicate to the world that "love grows through love and through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and worldly understandings of love and makes us one."²⁰

If our faith is based in this Trinitarian mystery that is fundamentally a mystery of communion then all of our earthly efforts and activities must work toward building up the human community (family) that is a reflection of God's rich, Trinitarian life.

Note: Facilitators take a five minute break and ask the couples to write down two things they learned from this presentation. The purpose of this exercise is to help the couples process the material. At the end of the day, take about 15–30 minutes and ask the couples to share what they learned with the larger group.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Original State of Holiness

In the beginning, man and woman were in the state of original holiness, without sin, suffering, sickness, or death.

The Divine Command

After God had created Adam and Eve and brought them together in the communion of love, God gave Adam a divine command: "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die."²¹ **"The 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom."**²²

The Question by the Cunning Serpent

According to Origen of Alexandria, "the violence at the heart of the human condition began with the question by the cunning serpent, **'Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?'**"²³ In this particular passage, God reveals the instigator of all evil: Satan, God's nemesis, an angel consumed by pride and cast out of Heaven. We read in Revelation how Satan, who was defeated by St. Michael, went to wage warfare against those who keep God's commandments.²⁴

In Genesis, "we see the original vision of God for union between men and women that was so intimate, with a love so pure that there was the deepest trust and intimacy. We find no shame here in the full revelation of their hearts and bodies offered as gift to one another. But Satan filled with pride, jealousy, and envy sought to attack the root of this intimacy between men and women, and between man and their Creator."²⁵

Satan incessantly tempts us to desire to reach beyond the limits of our present existence, not merely to ascend to God, to become like God, but indeed to become equal to God. By answering the question of the serpent, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any trees in the garden?"²⁶ Eve fell prey to the inordinate desire of pride, the overreaching desire for that which is not of God; the unrestrained desire for power over her Creator.